

A Fashionable Woman's Prayer in Church.

Give me an eye to others' failings blind,
(Miss Smith's new bonnet's quite a fright be-
hind.)
Wake in me charity for the suffering poor
(There comes that contribution plate once
more.)
Take from my soul all feelings covetous,
(I'll have a dress like that or make a fuss.)
Let love for all my kind my spirit fill,
(Save Miss Jones. I'll never speak to her.)
Let me in Truth's fair pages take delight,
(I'll read that other novel through to night.)
Make me contented with my earthly state,
(I wish I'd married rich, but it's too late.)
Give me a heart of faith in all my kind,
(Miss Brown's as big a hypocrite as you'll find.)
Help me to see myself as others see,
(This dress is quite becoming unto me.)
Let me act on no falsehood, I appeal,
(I wonder if they think these curls are real.)
Make my heart of humility the fount,
(How glad I am our pew is so far in front.)
Fill me with patience and the strength to wait,
(I know he'll prelate until our dinner's late.)
Take from my heart each grain of self-conceit,
(I'm sure the gentlemen must think me sweet.)
Let saintly wisdom be my daily food,
(I wonder what they'll have for dinner good.)
Let not my feet ache in the road to light,
(Nobody knows how these shoes pinch and bite.)
In this world teach me to deserve the next,
(Church out, "Charles, do you recollect the
text?")
—American Paper.

Michael Strogoff,
OR,
THE COURIER OF THE CZAR.

By Jules Verne.

CHAPTER VII.—CONTINUED.

The man with the hearty voice spoke Russian, but with a foreign accent; and the Russian speaker answered him more reservedly in the same language, evidently, however, not his native tongue.

"What?" said the first, "are you on board this boat, too, my dear fellow; you whom I met at the imperial fête in Moscow, and just caught a glimpse of at Nijni-Novgorod?"

"Yes, it's me," answered the second, dryly.

"Well, really, I didn't expect to be so closely followed by you."

"Indeed! I am not following you, sir; I am preceding you."

"Precede! precede! Let us march abreast, keeping step, like two soldiers on parade, and for the time, at least, let us agree, if you will, that one shall not pass the other."

"On the contrary, I shall pass you."

"We shall see that, when we are on the theater of war, but till then, why, let us be traveling companions. Later, we shall have both time and occasion to be rivals."

"Enemies."

"Enemies, if you like. There is a precision in your words, my dear fellow, which is particularly agreeable to me. One may always know what one has to look for with you."

"What is the harm?"

"No harm at all. So in my turn, I will ask your permission to state our respective situations."

"State away."

"You are going to Perm—like me?"

"Like you."

"Probably you will go from Perm to Ekaterinburg, since that is the route by which to cross the Ural Mountains."

"Probably."

"Once past the frontier, we shall be in Siberia, that is to say, in the midst of the invasion."

"We shall be there."

"Well, then, and only then, will be the time to say. Each for himself, and God for me."

"For me."

"For you, all by yourself! Very well! But since we have a week of neutral days before us, since it is very certain that news will not shower down upon us on the way, let us be friends until we become rivals again."

"Enemies."

"Yes, that's right, enemies. But I'll then, let us act together, and not try to ruin each other. All the same, I propose to you to keep to myself all that I can hear."

"And I, all that I can hear."

"Is that agreed?"

"It is agreed."

"Your hand?"

"Here it is!"

And the hand of the first speaker, that is to say, five wide-open fingers rigorously shook the two fingers coolly extended by the other.

"By-the-by," said the first, "I was able this morning to telegraph the very words of the order to my cousin at seventeen minutes past ten."

"And I sent it to the Daily Telegraph at thirteen minutes past ten."

"Bravo, Mr. Blount!"

"Very good, Mr. Jolivet."

"I will try and match that!"

"It will be difficult."

"I can try, however."

So saying the French correspondent familiarly saluted the Englishman, who bowed stiffly. The governor's proclamation did not concern these two news-hunters, as they were neither Russians nor foreigners of Asiatic origin. They set out, however, and being urged by the same instinct, had left Nijni-Novgorod together. It was natural that they should take the same means of transport, and that they should follow the same route to the Siberian steppes. Traveling companions, whether enemies or friends, they had a week to pass together before "the hunt would be open." And then success to the most expert! Alcide Jolivet had made the first advances, and though Harry Blount had accepted them, he had done so coolly.

That very day, at dinner, however, the Frenchman, open as ever, and even too loquacious, the Englishman still silent and grave, were seen hobnobbing at the same table, drinking genuine Claret, at six roubles the bottle, made from the best sap of the birch trees of the country.

On hearing Alcide Jolivet and Harry Blount chatting away together, Michael Strogoff said to himself: "These are inquisitive and indiscreet fellows whom I shall probably meet again on the way. It will be prudent for me to keep them at a distance."

The young Livonian did not come to dinner. She was asleep in her cabin, and Michael did not like to awaken her. It was evening before she re-appeared on the deck of the Caucasus.

The twilight imparted a coolness to the atmosphere eagerly enjoyed by the passengers after the stifling heat of the day. As the evening advanced, the greater number never even thought of going back to the saloon and

of the steamboat, were the old Bohemian and the woman who had played the spy on him. With them, and no doubt under their direction, landed about twenty dancers and singers from fifteen to twenty years of age, wrapped in old cloaks, which covered their gaudy dresses. These dresses, just then, glancing in the first rays of the sun, reminded Michael of the curious appearance which he had observed during the night. It must have been the glitter of those spangles in the bright flames issuing suddenly from the steamboat's funnel, which had attracted his attention.

"Evidently," said Michael to himself, "this troop of Tsiganes, after remaining below all day, crouched under the forecastle during the night. Were these gypsies trying to show themselves as little as possible? Such is not according to the usual custom of their race."

Michael Strogoff no longer doubted that the expressions he had heard which so clearly referred to him, had proceeded from this tawny group, and had been exchanged between the old gypsy, and the woman named Sangarre.

Michael involuntarily moved toward the gangway, as the Bohemian troop was leaving the steamboat, not to return to it again.

The old Bohemian was there, in a humble attitude, little conformable with the effrontery natural to his race. One would have said that he was endeavoring rather to avoid attention than to attract it. His battered hat, browned by the sun of every clime, was pulled forward over his wrinkled face. His arched back was bent under an old cloak, wrapped closely round him, notwithstanding the heat. It would have been difficult, in this miserable dress, to judge of either his size or face. Near him was the Tsigan, Sangarre, a woman about thirty years old. She was tall and well made, with olive complexion, magnificent eyes, and golden hair, and carried herself to perfection.

Many of the young dancers were remarkably pretty, all possessing the clear-cut features of their race. These Tsiganes are generally very attractive, and more than one of the great Russian nobles, who try to vie with the English in eccentricity, has not hesitated to choose his wife from among these gypsy girls. One of them humming a song of a strange rhythm; the first lines might be thus rendered:

"Glitters brightly the gold
In my raven locks streaming,
Rich coral around
My graceful neck gleaming;
Like a bird of the air,
Through the wide world I roam."

The laughing girl, no doubt, continued her song, but Michael Strogoff ceased to listen to it.

Indeed, it struck him just then that the Tsigan, Sangarre, regarding him with a peculiar gaze, as if she wished to fix his features indelibly in her memory.

It was but for a few moments, when Sangarre herself followed the old man and his troop, who had already left the vessel.

"That's a bold gypsy," said Michael to himself. "Could she have recognized me as the man whom she saw at Nijni-Novgorod? These confounded Tsiganes have the eyes of a cat! They can see in the dark; and that woman there might well know."

Michael Strogoff was on the point of following Sangarre and the gypsy hand, but he stopped.

"No," thought he, "no unguarded proceedings. If I were to stop that old fortune-teller and his companions, my incognito would run a risk of being discovered. Besides, now they have landed, before they can pass the frontier, I shall be already beyond the Ural. I know that they may take the route from Kasaan to Ishim, but that affords no resources to travelers, and besides a tarantass, drawn by four good Siberian horses, will always go faster than a gypsy cart! Come, friend, Korpanoff, make yourself easy."

By this time the old man and Sangarre had disappeared in the crowd.

Kasaan is justly called the "Gate of Asia," and considered as the center of Siberian and Bohemian commerce, for two roads begin here and lead across the Ural Mountains. But Michael Strogoff had very judiciously chosen the one by Perm, Ekaterinburg, and Tioumen. It is the great stage-road, well supplied with relays kept at the expense of the government, and is prolonged from Ishim to Irkutsk.

An hour afterward the bell rang on board the Caucasus, calling the new passengers, and recalling the former ones. It was now seven o'clock in the morning. The requisite fuel had been received on board. The whole vessel began to vibrate from the effects of the steam. She was ready to start. Passengers going from Kasaan to Perm were crowding on the deck.

Just then Michael noticed that of the two reporters, Harry Blount alone had rejoined the steamer. Was Jolivet about to miss his passage?

But just as the ropes were being cast off, Alcide Jolivet appeared, tearing along. The steamer was already sheering off, the gangway bridge had been drawn on to the quay, but Alcide Jolivet would not stick at such a little thing as that, so with a bound like a harlequin, he alighted on the deck of the Caucasus, almost into his rival's arms.

"I thought the Caucasus was going without you, said the latter."

"Bah!" answered Jolivet, "I should soon have caught you up again, by chartering a boat at my cousin's expense, or by travelling post at twenty coopecks a verst, and on horse back. What could I do? It was so long away from the quay to the telegraph office!"

"Have you been to the telegraph office?" asked Harry Blount, biting his lips.

"That's exactly where I have been," answered Jolivet, with his most amiable smile. "And it is still working to Kalyvan."

"That I do not know; but I can assure you, for instance, that it is working from Kasaan to Paris."

"You sent a dispatch to your cousin?"

"With enthusiasm."

"You had learnt, then—"

"Look here, little father, as the Russians say," replied Alcide Jolivet, "I am a good fellow, and I don't wish to keep anything from you. The Tartars, with Feodor-Khan at their head, have passed Semipalatinsk, and are descending the Irtysh. Do you like that?"

What such important news, and Harry Blount did not know it! and his rival, who had probably learnt it from some inhabitant of Kasaan, had already transmitted it to Paris. The English paper was distanced! Harry Blount crossing his hands behind his back, walked off and seated himself in the stern of the steamboat without uttering a word.

About ten o'clock in the morning, the young Livonian, leaving her cabin, appeared on deck. Michael Strogoff went forward and took her hand.

"Look, sister!" said he, leading her to the bows of the Caucasus.

The view was indeed well worth examining.

The Caucasus had just then reached the confluence of the Volga and the Kama. There she would leave the former river, after having descended it for more than four hundred miles, to ascend the latter for four hundred and sixty versts.

The Kama was here very wide, and its wooded banks lovely. A few white sails enlivened the sparkling water. The horizon

was closed by a line of hills covered with aspen, alders, and sometimes large oaks.

But these beauties of nature could not distract the thoughts of the young Livonian even for an instant. She had left her hands in that of her companion, and soon turning to him.

"At what distance are we from Moscow?"

"Nine hundred versts," answered Michael.

"Nine hundred out of seven thousand?"

The young woman smiled, and then she said: "The ball now announced the breakfast hour. Nadia followed Michael Strogoff to the restaurant. She ate little, as a poor girl whose means are small would do. Michael Strogoff thought it best to content himself with the fare which satisfied his companion; and in less than twenty minutes Michael Strogoff and Nadia returned on deck. There they seated themselves in the stern, and, without other preamble, Nadia, lowering her voice so as to be heard by him alone, began:

"Brother, I am the daughter of an exile. My name is Nadia Fedor. My mother fled at Riga scarcely a month ago, and I am going to Irkutsk, to rejoin my father and share his exile."

"I, too, am going to Irkutsk," answered Michael, "and I shall thank heaven if it enables me to give Nadia Fedor safe into her father's hands."

"Thank you, brother," replied Nadia.

Michael Strogoff then added that he had obtained a special *podorojna* for Siberia, and that the Russian authorities could in no way hinder him.

Nadia asked nothing more. She saw in this fortunate meeting with Michael a means only of accelerating her journey to her father.

"I had," said she, "a permit which authorized me to go to Irkutsk, but the order of the Governor of Nijni-Novgorod annulled that, and but for you, brother, I should have been unable to leave the town, and without doubt I should have perished."

"And dared you, alone, Nadia," said Michael, "attempt to cross the steppes of Siberia?"

"The Tartar invasion was not known when I left Riga," replied the young girl. "It was only at Moscow that I learned that news."

"And, notwithstanding that, you continued your journey?"

"It was my duty."

This word showed the character of the courageous girl.

She then spoke of her father, Wassili Fedor. He was a much esteemed physician at Riga. But his connection with some secret society having been asserted, he received orders to start for Irkutsk, and the police who brought the order conducted him without delay beyond the frontier. Wassili Fedor had but time to embrace his sick wife and his daughter, so soon to be left alone, when, shedding bitter tears, he was led away.

A year and a half after her husband's departure, Madame Fedor died in the arms of her daughter, who was thus left alone and almost penniless. Nadia then asked, and easily obtained from the Russian government, an authorization to join her father at Irkutsk. She wrote and told him she was starting. She had barely enough money for this long journey, and yet she did not hesitate to undertake it. She would do what she could. God would do the rest.

CHAPTER IX.

Two next day, the 19th of July, the Caucasus reached Perm, the last place at which she touched on the Kama.

The government of which Perm is the capital is one of the largest in the Russian Empire, and, extending over the Ural Mountains, encroaches on Siberian territory. Marble quarries, mines of salt, platinum, gold, and coal, are worked here on a large scale. Although Perm, by its situation, has become an important town, it is by no means attractive, being extremely muddy and dirty, and possessing no resources. This want of comforts of no consequence to those going from Russia to Siberia, for they come from the more civilized districts, and are supplied with all necessities; but to those arriving from the countries of Central Asia, after a long and fatiguing journey, it would, no doubt, be more satisfactory if the first European town of the empire, situated on the Asiatic frontier, were better supplied with stores.

At Perm the travelers re-sell their vehicles, more or less damaged by the long journey across the plains of Siberia. There, too, those passing from Europe to Asia purchase carriages during the summer and sleighs in the winter season, before starting for a several months' journey through the steppes.

Michael Strogoff had already sketched out his programme; so now he had only to execute it.

A vehicle carrying the mails usually runs across the Ural Mountains, but at the present time this, of course, was discontinued. Even if it had not been so, Michael Strogoff would not have taken it, as he wished to travel as fast as possible without depending on any one. He wisely preferred to buy a carriage on his journey by stages, as much as he was of the positions, or as much as he was called by well-kept roads, or as tips.

Unfortunately, in consequence of the measures taken against foreigners of Asiatic origin, a large number of travelers had already left Perm, and therefore conveyances were extremely rare. Michael was obliged to content himself with what had been rejected by others. As to horses, as long as the Czar's courier was not in Siberia, he could exhibit his *podorojna* without danger, and the postmasters would give him the preference. But once out of European Russia, he had to depend alone on the power of his roubles.

But to what sort of vehicle should he harness his horses?

Michael Strogoff was lucky enough to discover a tarantass.

It is to be hoped that the invention of Russian coach builders will devise some improvement in this last named vehicle. Springs are wanting in it; so it is very uncomfortable; in the absence of iron, wood is not spared; but its four wheels, with eight or nine feet between them, assure a certain equilibrium over the jolting rough roads. A splash-board protects the travelers from the mud, and a strong leather hood, which may be pulled quite over the occupiers, shelters them from the great heat and violent storm of the summer.

It was not without careful search that Michael managed to discover this tarantass, and there was probably not a second to be found in all the town of Perm. Notwithstanding that, he "haggled" long about the price, for form's sake, to act up to his part as "Nicholas Korpanoff," a plain merchant of Irkutsk.

Nadia had followed her companion in his search after a suitable vehicle. Although the object of each was different, both were equally anxious to arrive, and consequently, to start. One would have said the same will animated them both.

"Sister," said Michael, "I wish I could have found a more comfortable conveyance for you."

"Do you say that to me, brother, when I would have gone on foot, if need were to rejoin my father?"

"I do not doubt your courage, Nadia; but there are physical fatigues which a woman may be able to endure."

"I shall endure them, what ever they may be," replied the girl. "But you have no complaint from my lips and my eyes, and I am on the road, and continue your journey with me."

Half an hour later on, the *podorojna* being presented by Michael, three coaches were harnessed to the tarantass. These animals, covered with long hair, were very long-legged beasts. They were small and spirited, but of Siberian breed.

The way in which the iemshchik had harnessed them was thus: one, the largest, was secured between two long shafts on whose farther end was a hoop, called a douga, carrying tassels and bells; the two others were simply fastened by ropes to the steps of the tarantass. This was the complete harness, with mere strings for reins.

Neither Michael Strogoff nor the young Livonian had any baggage. The rapidity with which one wished to make the journey, and the more than modest resources of the other, prevented them from embarrassing themselves with packages. "It was a fortunate thing under the circumstances, for the tarantass could not have carried both baggage and travelers. It was only made for two persons, without counting the iemshchik, who kept his equilibrium on his narrow seat in a marvelous manner."

The iemshchik is changed at every relay. The man who drove the tarantass during the first stage was, like his horses, a Siberian, and no less shaggy than they; long hair, cut square on the forehead; hat with turned up rim, red belt, coat with crossed facings and buttons stamped with the imperial cipher. The iemshchik, on coming up with his team, threw an inquisitive glance at the passengers of the tarantass. "No baggage!—and had there been, where in the world could he have stowed it? Rather shabby in appearance, too. He looked contemptuous."

"Crows," said he, without caring whether he was overheard or not; "crows at six coopecks a verst!"

"No, eagles!" said Michael, who understood the iemshchik's slang perfectly: "eagles, do you hear, at nine coopecks a verst, and a tip besides."

He was answered by a merry crack of the whip.

In the language of the Russian postillions the "crow" is the stately or poor traveler, who at the post house only pays two or three coopecks a verst for the horses. The "eagle" is the traveler who does not mind expense, to say nothing of liberal tips. Therefore, the crow could not claim to fly as rapidly as the imperial bird.

Nadia and Michael immediately took their places in the tarantass. A small store of provisions was put in the box, in case at any time they were delayed in reaching the post-houses, which are very comfortably provided under direction of the state. The hood was pulled up, as it was inauspiciously hot, and at twelve o'clock the tarantass, drawn by its three horses, left Perm in a cloud of dust.

The way in which the iemshchik kept up the pace of his team would have certainly astonished travelers who, being neither Russians nor Siberians, were not accustomed to this sort of thing. The leader, rather larger than the others, kept to a steady, long trot, perfectly regular, whether up or down hill. The two other horses seemed to know no other pace than the gallop, though they performed many an eccentric curvette as they went along. The iemshchik, however, never touched them, only urging them on by starting cracks of his whip. But what epithets he lavished on them, including the names of all the saints in the calendar, when they behaved like docile and conscious animals! The string which served as reins would have had no influence on the spirited beasts, but the words *na pravo*, to the right, *na levo*, to the left, pronounced in a guttural tone, were more effectual than either bridle or snaffle.

And what amiable expressions, according to the circumstances.

"Go on, my doves!" the iemshchik would say. "Go on, pretty swallows! Fly, my little pigeons! Hold up, my cousin on the left! Glee up, my little father on the right!"

But when the pace slackened, what insulting expressions, instantly understood by the sensitive animals.

"Go on, you wretched snail! Confound you, you slug! I'll roast you alive, you tortoise, you!"

Whether or not it was from this way of driving, which requires the iemshchiks to possess strong throats more than muscular arms, the tarantass flew along at the rate of from twelve to fourteen miles an hour.

For a little while Nadia did not speak. Then, possessed with the one thought, that of reaching her journey's end.

"I have calculated that there are three hundred versts between Perm and Ekaterinburg, brother," said she. "Am I right?"

"You are quite right, Nadia," answered Michael; "and when we have reached Ekaterinburg, we shall be at the foot of the Ural Mountains on the opposite side to this."

"How long will it take to get across the mountains?"

"Forty-eight hours, for we shall travel day and night. I say day and night, Nadia," added he, "for I cannot stop even for a moment, and I must go on without rest toward Irkutsk."

"I shall not delay you, brother; no, not even for an hour, and we will travel day and night."

"Well, then, Nadia, if the Tartar invasion has only left the road open, we shall arrive in twenty days."

"You have made this journey before?"

"Many times."

"During winter we should have gone more rapidly and surely, should we not?"

"Yes, especially with more rapidity, but you would have suffered much from the frost and snow."

"What matter! Winter is the friend of Russia."

"Yes, Nadia; but what a constitution any one must have to endure such friendship! I have often seen the temperature in the Siberian steppes fall to more than sixty degrees below freezing point! I have felt, notwithstanding my reindeer coat, my heart growing chill, my limbs stiffening, my feet freezing in triple woollen socks. I have seen my sleigh horses covered with a coating of ice, their breath congealed at their nostrils. I have seen the brandy in my flask change into hard stone, on which not even my knife could make any impression. But my sleigh flew like the wind. Not an obstacle on the plain, white and level farther than the eye could reach. No rivers in which one is obliged to look for a fordable passage. No lakes which must be crossed in boats. Harsh everywhere, the route open; the road sure. But at the price of what suffering! Nadia; these alone could say, who have never returned, but whose bodies have been covered up by the snow-storm."

"However, you have returned, brother," said Nadia.

During the day halts were made for food alone. At the post-houses could be found lodging and provision. Besides, if there was not an inn, the house of the Russian

peasant would have been no less hospitable. In the villages, with their white-walled, green-roofed chapels, the traveler might knock at a door, and continue your journey in the shade of a willow.

"Arriving that evening, Michael instinctively asked the postmaster how many hours ago the carriage which preceded them passed that stage."

"Two hours ago, little father," replied the postmaster.

"Is that all?"

"No, it is all."

"How many travelers?"

"Two."

"And they are going fast?"

"Fast!"

"Yes, but I am a Siberian, and when quite a child, I used to follow my father to the chase, and so became inured to these hardships. But when you said to me, Nadia, that winter would not have stopped you, that you would have gone alone, ready to struggle against the frightful inclemencies of the Siberian climate, I seemed to see you lost in the snow and falling, never to rise again."

"How many times have you crossed the steppes in winter?" asked the young Livonian.

"Three times, Nadia, when I was going to Omsk."

"And what were you going to do at Omsk?"

"See my mother, who was expecting me."

"And I am going to Irkutsk, where my father expects me. I am taking him my mother's last words. That is as much as to tell you, brother, that nothing would have prevented me from setting out."

"You are a brave girl, Nadia," replied Michael. "God himself would have led you."

All day the tarantass was driven rapidly by the iemshchiks who succeeded each other at every stage. The eagles of the mountain would not have found their name dishonored by these "eagles" of the highway. The high price paid for each horse, and the tips dealt out so freely, recommended the travelers in a special way. Perhaps the postmasters thought it singular that after the publication of the order, a young man and his sister, evidently both Russians, could travel freely across Siberia, which was closed to every one else, but their papers were all on leg, and they had the right to pass.

However, Michael Strogoff and Nadia were not the only travelers on their way from Perm to Ekaterinburg. At the first stages, the courier of the Czar had learnt that the carriage preceded them, but as there was no want of horses, he did not trouble himself about that.

"Let them put the horses to as soon as possible," Michael and Nadia, resolved not to stop even for an hour, traveled all night.

The weather continued fine, though the atmosphere was heavy, and gradually becoming charged with electricity. Not a cloud was in the sky, but a sort of mist ascended from the ground. It was to be hoped that a storm would not burst while they were among the mountains, for there it would be terrible. Being accustomed to read atmospheric signs, Michael Strogoff knew that a struggle of the elements was approaching.

The night passed without incident. Notwithstanding the jolting of the tarantass, Nadia was able to sleep for some hours. The hood was partly raised so as to give as much air as there was in the stifling atmosphere.

Michael kept awake all night, mistrusting the iemshchiks, who are only too ready to sleep at their posts, and not an hour was lost at the relays, not an hour on the road.

The next day, the 20th of July, at about eight o'clock in the morning, they caught the first glimpse of the Ural Mountains in the east. However, this important chain which separates Russia in Europe from Siberia was still at a great distance, and they could not hope to reach it until the end of the day. The passage of the mountains must necessarily be performed during the next night.

The sky was very cloudy all day, and the temperature was therefore more bearable, but the weather was very threatening. It would perhaps have been more prudent not to have ascended the mountains during the night, and Michael would not have done so, had he been permitted to wait; but when, at the last stage, the iemshchik drew his attentions to a peal of thunder reverberating among the rocks, he merely said:

"Is a telga still before us?"

"Yes."

"How long is it in advance?"

"Nearly an hour."

"Forward, and a triple tip if we are at Ekaterinburg to-morrow morning!"

CHAPTER X.

The Ural Mountains extend in a length of nearly three thousand versts between Europe and Asia. Whether they are called the Urales, which is the Tartar, or the Poyas, which is the Russian name, they are correctly so termed; for these names signify "belt" in both languages. Rising on the shores of the Arctic Sea, they reach the borders of the Caspian. Such was the barrier to be crossed by Michael Strogoff before he could enter Siberian Russia, and, as has been said, he acted wisely in taking the road leading from Perm to Ekaterinburg, situated on the eastern slope of the Ural Mountains. This was the easiest and surest route, as it was that of all the commerce of Central Asia. The mountains here opened in one night, if no accident happened. Unfortunately, thunder muttering in the distance announced that a storm was at hand. The electric tension was such that it could not be dispersed without a tremendous explosion, which in the peculiar state of the atmosphere, would be very terrible.

Michael took care to have his young companion should be as well protected as possible. The hood which might have been easily blown away, was fastened more securely with ropes, crossed above and at the back. The traces were doubled, and as an additional precaution, the "nave-boxes" were stuffed with straw, as much to increase the strength of the wheels as to lessen the jolting, unavoidable on a dark night. Lastly, the fore and hinder parts, connected simply by the axles to the body of the tarantass, were joined one to the other by a cross-bar, fixed by means of pins and screws. This bar took the place of the curved bar which in berlines is suspended on the "swan's-neck," fastens the two axes one to the other.

Nadia resumed her place in the cart, and Michael took his seat beside her. Before the lowered hood hung two leather curtains, which would in some degree protect the travelers against the rain.

Two great lanterns, suspended on the left of the iemshchik's seat, threw a pale glimmer, scarcely sufficient to light the way, but serving as warning lights to prevent any other carriage from running into them.

It was well that all these precautions were taken, in expectation of a rough night, and the order was given to the iemshchik, and away rattled the tarantass up the first slopes of the Ural Mountains.

It was eight o'clock, and darkness was coming on; in spite of the lengthened twilight of these latitudes. Mists of vapor, as yet disturbed by no wind, hung in the vault of heaven. Although they had no lateral motion